

SOLDIER OF ARETE

GENE WOLFE



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Glossary

Tor books by Gene Wolfe

The saga of Latro, the Soldier of the Mist, continues

Copyright

This book
is dedicated
to the old colonel,
the most underrated
of ancient authors
and the least heeded:
Xenophon the Athenian

And there came one to Xenophon as he was offering sacrifice, and said, "Gryllus is dead." And Xenophon took off the garland that was on his head, but ceased not his sacrifice. Then the messenger said, "His death was noble." And Xenophon returned the garland to his head again; and it is the tale that he shed no tears, but said, "I knew that I begat him mortal."

—Diogenes Laertius

Foreword

This scroll is in poor condition and contains various lacunae. “Latro” seems not to have written for a week or more following the departure of his party from Pactye. The Thracian winter may well have been the sole cause; although papyrus will endure for thousands of years, it falls to bits on being wet. Its fragile nature is only too well illustrated by this example, which has been severely damaged toward its center. By that, we have lost a considerable portion of the text, presumably dealing with the arrival of the *Europa* at Piraeus. A third hiatus, apparently resulting from morbid depression, follows his description of the ceremony of manumission at Sparta.

The horsemanship of the ancients has been much maligned by modern scholars unable to conceive of a rider retaining his seat without stirrups. They would be well advised to look into the history of the Plains Indians, who rode like ancient cavalymen and like them employed lances, bows, and javelins. (The light, long-hafted axes used by the Persian cavalry would be instantly approved by Geronimo and Cochise.) In my opinion the Indian who fired his .45-70 Springfield from the back of his galloping pony—and this was done frequently—performed a feat more difficult than any demanded of ancient horsemen.

The reader should be aware that the horses of the ancient Greeks were unshod and were rarely gelded—never, if they were to be used in war. Though they were small by modern standards, the lack of stirrups made mounting difficult. (In fact, it may well be that stirrups were originally mounting devices, adopted when selective breeding had at last produced larger animals.) The cavalryman employed his lance or pair of javelins to vault onto his horse’s back. Some horses were trained to advance their forelegs to render mounting easier.

As this account makes abundantly clear, modern historians are mistaken in rejecting the Amazon as legendary. Ancient writers record their invasion of central Greece in the time of Theseus (c. 1600 B.C.) in circumstantial detail, while the funeral mounds of fallen Amazon leaders dotted the route from Attica to Thrace. In any event, it should be obvious that among nomads a determined 120-pound woman might be a more valuable fighter than a man of half again her weight, equally effective with the bow while tiring her mount far less. It should not be necessary to point out that women warriors are found throughout history, or that our own age has more than most.

Pankration was the ancient equivalent of the martial arts. Only biting and gouging were forbidden and the fight continued until the loser acknowledged his defeat. Students are cautioned that not even an athlete shown striking another with his fists is a boxer. Boxers’ hands were bound with leather thong.

This scroll is of particular interest in that it contains the only known example of the prose of Pindar, after Homer the greatest Greek poet.

Part 1

I Will Make a New Beginning

On this fresh scroll, which the black man has found in the city. This morning Io showed me how she wrote in my old one and told me how valuable it had been to me. I read only the first sheet and the last, but I mean to read the rest before the sun sets. Now, however, I intend to write down all the things that will be most needful for me to know.

Latro is what these people call me, though I doubt that it is my name. The man in the lion's skin called me *Lucius*, or so I wrote in the first scroll. There also I wrote that I forget very quickly, and do not believe it to be true. When I try to recall what took place yesterday, I find only confused impressions of walking, working, and talking, so that I am like a vessel lost in fog, from which the lookout sees perhaps, looming shadows that may be rocks, or other vessels, or nothing—hears voices that may be those of men ashore, or of the tritons, or ghosts.

It is not so with Io, nor, I believe, with the black man. Thus I have learned that this is the Thracian Chersonese, this captured city, Sestos. Here a battle was fought by the Men of Thought against the People from Parsa by which the chief men of the latter hoped to escape. Thus says Io, and when I objected that the city seems fit to stand a lengthy siege, she explained there was not food enough, so that the People from Parsa and the Hellenes, too (for it is a city of Hellenes), starved behind the walls. Io is a child, yet nearly a woman. Her hair is long and dark.

The governor of the place assembled all his forces before one of the chief gates and put his wives and female slaves (of whom he had many) in tented carts. There he harangued his men, saying he would lead them against the Men of Thought; but when the gates were unbarred, he and his ministers went swiftly and secretly to another part of the wall and let themselves down by straps, thinking to escape while the battle raged. It was for naught, and some are captives here.

As am I, for there is a man called Hypereides who speaks of me as his slave—the black man also (His head, which is round and very bald, reaches to my nose; he stands straight and speaks quickly). Nor is this all, for Io—who calls herself *my* slave though this morning I offered to free her—says King Pausanias of Rope claims us, too. He sent us here, and a hundred of his Rope Makers were here until just before the battle, when their leader was wounded and they (having little liking for sieges and expecting a long one) sailed for home.

It is winter. The wind blows hard and cold, and rain falls often; but we live in a fine house, one of those the People from Parsa took for their own use earlier. There are sandals beneath my bed, but we wear boots—Io says that Hypereides bought such boots for all of us when the city surrendered, and two pairs for himself. This Chersonese is a very rich land, and like all rich lands it turns to mud in the rain.

This morning I went to the market. The citizens of Sestos are Hellenes, as I said, and of the Aeolian race—the people of the winds. They asked anxiously whether we planned to stay all winter and told me much of the danger of sailing to Hellas at this season; I believe this is because they fear that the People from Parsa will not delay in recapturing so fertile a country. When I returned, I asked Io if she thought we would stay. She said we would surely go, and soon; but that we might come back if the People from Parsa try to retake the city.

* * *

Something quite unusual happened this evening, and though it has been dark for a long while, I wish to make a note of it before I go out again. Here Hypereides writes his orders and keeps his accounts, and there is a fire and a fine bright lamp with four wicks.

He came while I was polishing his greaves and had me buckle on my sword and put on my cloaks and my new patasos. Together we hurried through the city to the citadel, where the prisoners are kept. We climbed many steps to a room in a tower, in which the only prisoners were a man and a boy; there were two guards also, but Hypereides dismissed them. When they were gone, he seated himself and said, “Artaÿctes, my poor friend, it is in no easy position that you find yourself.”

The man of Parsa nodded. He is a large man with cold eyes, and though his beard is nearly gray he looks strong; seeing him, I thought I understood why Hypereides had wanted me to accompany him.

“You know that I’ve done all I could for you,” Hypereides continued. “Now I require that you do something for me—a very small thing.”

“No doubt,” replied Artaÿctes. “What is this small thing?” He speaks the tongue of Hellas worse even than I, I think.

“When your master crossed into our land, he did so upon a bridge of boats. Isn’t that so?”

Artaÿctes nodded, as did the boy.

“I’ve heard that its deck was covered with earth for its entire length,” Hypereides continued, wondering. “Some even assert that the earth was planted with trees.”

The boy said, “It was—I saw it. There were saplings and bushes at the sides so our cavalry horses wouldn’t be afraid of the water.”

Hypereides whistled softly. “Amazing! Really amazing! I envy you—it must have been a wonderful sight.” He turned back to the father, saying, “A most promising young lord. What’s his name?”

“It is Artembares,” Artaÿctes told him. “He’s named for my grandfather, who was a friend to Cyrus.”

At that Hypereides smiled slyly. “But wasn’t all the world a friend to Cyrus? Conquerors have great many friends.”

Artaÿctes was not to be disturbed thus. “What you say is true,” he said. “Yet all the world did not sit over wine with Cyrus.”

Hypereides shook his head ruefully. “How sad to think that Artembares’ descendant drinks no wine

at all now. Or at least, I wouldn't think they give you any here."

"Water and gruel, mostly," Artaÿctes admitted.

"I don't know whether I can save your life and your son's," Hypereides told him. "The citizen want to see you dead, and Xanthippos, as always, seems to favor the side to which he is speaking at the moment. But while you still live I think I can promise you wine—good wine, too, for I'll furnish myself—and better food if you'll answer one small question for me."

Artaÿctes glanced at me, then asked, "Why don't you beat me until I speak, Hypereides? You and this fellow could manage it, I imagine."

"I wouldn't do such a thing," Hypereides said virtuously. "Not to an old acquaintance. However, there are others...."

"Of course. I have my honor to consider, Hypereides. But I am not unreasonable—nor am I so stupid that I do not guess that Xanthippos sent you. What is his question?"

Hypereides grinned, then grew serious once more, rubbing his hands as though about to sell something at a good price. "I—I, Artaÿctes—desire to know whether the noble Oeobazus was in your party when you let yourself down from the wall."

Artaÿctes glanced at his son, his hard eyes so swift I was not sure that I had seen them move. "I see no harm in telling you that—he will have made good his escape by now."

Hypereides rose, smiling. "Thank you, my friend! You may trust me for everything I have promised. And more, because I'll see to it that both your lives are spared, if I can. Latro, I must confer with some people here. I want you to go back to the place where we're staying and fetch a skin of the best wine for Artaÿctes and his son. I'll tell the guards to let you in with it when you return. Bring a torch, too; it will be dark before we go back, I think."

I nodded and unbarred the door for Hypereides; but before his foot had touched the threshold, I turned to put another question to Artaÿctes. "By the way, where did you plan to cross? Across the Aegospotami?"

Artaÿctes shook his head. "Helle's Sea was black with your ships. At Pactye, perhaps, or farther north. May I ask why you are so much interested in my friend Oeobazus?"

But Artaÿctes' own question came too late; Hypereides was already hurrying away. I followed him out, and the soldiers who guarded Artaÿctes (who had been waiting on the wall for us to leave) returned to their posts.

The wall of Sestos varies in height from place to place as it circles the city; this was one of the highest, where I think it must be a hundred cubits at least. It commanded a fine view of countryside and the sun setting over the western lands, and I paused there for a moment to look at it. Those who stare at the sun go blind, as I well know, and thus I kept my eyes upon the land and the sun-dyed clouds, which were indeed very beautiful; but as chance would have it, I glimpsed the sun itself from the corner of my eye and saw there, in place of the usual sphere of fire, a chariot of gold drawn by four horses. I knew then that I had glimpsed a god, just as—according to my old scroll—I had seen a goddess before the death of the man who called me Lucius. It frightened me, as I suppose the goddess

must have also, and I hurried down the stairs and through the streets of Sestos (which are gloomy and very cramped, as no doubt those of all such walled cities must be) to this house. It was not until I had found a skin of excellent wine and bound together a handful of splents to make a torch, that I understood the full import of what I had seen.

For what I had seen was merely this: although the sun had nearly reached the horizon, the horses of the sun had been at a full gallop. It had seemed so natural that I had not paused to question it; but as I reflected upon the sight, I realized that no charioteer would drive at the gallop if he were close to the place at which he intended to halt—how could he stop his team without the gravest danger of wrecking his chariot? Indeed, though only two horses are hitched to the chariots used in war, all soldiers know that one of the chief advantages of cavalry is that horsemen may be halted and turned about much more readily than chariots.

Clearly then, the sun does not halt at the western limit of the world, as I have always supposed, but reappear next day at the eastern in the same way that fixed stars vanish in the west to reappear in the east. No, rather the sun continues at full career, passes beneath the world, and reappears in the east just as we should see a runner dash behind some building and reappear on the opposite side. I cannot help but wonder why. Are there those living beneath the world who have need of the sun, even as we? That is something I must consider at more length when I have the leisure to do so.

It would be a weary task to set down here all the thoughts—most half-formed and some very foolish—that filled my mind as I made my way through the streets again and mounted the stairs of the tower. Artayctes' guards let me in without caviling, and one even fetched a krater in which to mix water with the wine I had brought. While they were thus occupied, Artayctes drew me aside, saying softly, "There is no need for you to sleep badly, Latro. Help us and these fools will never learn to bore arms against them."

His words confirmed what I had already gathered from my old scroll—that I had once been in the service of the Great King of Parsa. I nodded and whispered that I would certainly free them if I could.

Just then Hypereides came in, all smiles, carrying six salt pilchards on a string. There was a charcoal brazier to warm the guardroom, and he laid the fish here and there upon the coals where they would not burn. "One for each of us, and they should be good eating. Not much fruit this time of year, or much food in Sestos yet after the siege; but Latro can go out and try to find us some apples when we've finished these, if you like. And some fresh bread, Latro. Didn't you tell me you'd seen a baker open today?"

I nodded and reminded him that I had bought bread when I went to the market.

"Excellent!" Hypereides exclaimed. "It'll be closed now, I'm afraid, but perhaps you can rouse the baker with a few thumps on his door." He winked at Artayctes. "Latro's a first-rate thumper, assure you, and commands a voice like a bull's when he wants to. Now if—"

At that moment something so extraordinary occurred that I hesitate to write of it, for I feel quite certain that I will not believe it when I read this scroll in the days that are yet to come: one of Hypereides' salted pilchards moved.

His eyes must have been sharper than mine, because he fell silent to stare at it, while I merely assumed that one of the pieces of charcoal supporting it had shifted. A moment later, I saw it flip its tail just as a hooked fish does when it is cast onto the riverbank; and in a moment more all six were flopping about on the coals as though they had been thrown alive into the fire.

To give the guards credit, they did not run; if they had, I believe I would have run as well. As for Hypereides, his face went white, and he backed away from the brazier as if it were a dog with the running disease. Artayctes' young son cowered like the rest of us, but Artayctes himself went calmly to Hypereides and laid a hand upon his shoulder, saying, "This prodigy has no reference to you, my friend. It is meant for me—Protesilaos of Elaeus is telling me that though he is as dead as a dried fish yet he has authority from the gods to punish the man who wronged him."

Hypereides gulped, and stammered, "Yes—that's—it's one of the chief reasons they insist that you—*that you and your son*— They say that you stole the offerings from his tomb and—and—plowed up his sacred soil."

Artayctes nodded and glanced toward the fish; by that time they had ceased to jump, but I shivered as if he were cold just the same. "Hear me now, Hypereides, and promise that you will report everything I say to Xanthippos. I will pay one hundred talents to restore the shrine of Protesilaos." He hesitated as though waiting for some further sign, but there was none. "And in addition I will give you soldiers from Thought two hundred talents if you will spare my son and me. The money is at Susa, but you can keep my boy here as a hostage until it is all paid. And it will *be* paid, I swear by Ahura Mazda, the god of the gods—paid in full and in gold."

Hypereides' eyes popped from their sockets at the magnitude of the sum. It is well known that the People of Parsa are rich beyond imagining, yet I think that few have dreamed that anyone other than the Great King himself could command such wealth as this offer of Artayctes' suggested. "I'll tell him. I'll— In the—no, tonight. If—"

"Good! Do so." Artayctes squeezed Hypereides' shoulder and stepped back.

Hypereides glanced at the guards. "But I'll have to tell him everything that's happened. Latro, don't imagine you fancy any of those fish—I know I don't. I think it's time we went home."

I will return to the citadel now—perhaps something can be done to help Artayctes and Artembare

Artaÿctes Dies

The herald's cry brought me from my bed this morning. I was pulling on my shoes when Hypereides rapped on the door of the room I share with Io. "Latro!" he called. "Are you awake?"

Io sat up and asked what the trouble was.

I told her, "Artaÿctes is to be executed this morning."

"Do you remember who he is?"

"Yes," I said. "I know I spoke with him last night, before Hypereides and I came home."

Just then Hypereides himself opened our door. "Ah, you're up. Want to come with me to see the man killed?"

I asked him who was to die, other than Artaÿctes.

"His son, I'm afraid." Hypereides shook his head sadly. "You don't remember Artaÿctes' boy?"

I cast my mind back. "I have some recollection of seeing a child last night," I told him. "Yes, I think it was a boy, a bit older than Io."

Hypereides pointed a finger at her. "*You* are to stay here, young woman! Do you understand me? You've work to do, and this will be no sight for a girl."

I followed him out into the street, where the black man was waiting for us; and the three of us set off for the sand spit on which the Great King's bridge had ended. It was there, as half a dozen heralds were still bawling (and as half Sestos was busy telling the other half) that Artaÿctes was to die. The day was overcast and windy, with gray clouds scudding along Helle's Sea from the First Sea in the north.

"This weather reminds me," Hypereides muttered, "that we must all have new cloaks before we leave here—you particularly, Latro. That rag of yours is hardly fit for a beggar."

The black man touched Hypereides' shoulder, his eyes wide.

"For you, too? Yes, of course. I said so. For all of us, in fact, even little Io."

The black man shook his head and repeated his gesture.

"Oh, ah. You want to know about our voyage—I was about to tell you. Get us to where we can see what's going on, you two, and I'll give you all the details."

By that time the people from Sestos were crowding forward and Xanthippos' troops were pushing them back with the butts of their spears. Fortunately several of the soldiers recognized Hypereides and we were able to claim a place in front without much trouble. There was nothing to see yet but a couple of men digging a hole, apparently for the end of a timber that they had carried to the spot.

"Xanthippos isn't here," Hypereides commented. "They won't be starting for a while yet."

I asked who Xanthippos was, and he said, "Our strategist. All these soldiers are under his command."

command. Don't you remember Artaÿctes mentioning him last night?"

I admitted I did not. The name *Artaÿctes* seemed familiar, which was natural enough since the heralds had been shouting it as we came; then I remembered telling Io that I had spoken with someone called Artaÿctes the night before.

Hypereides looked at me speculatively. "You don't remember the fish?"

I shook my head.

"They were pilchards. Do you know what a pilchard is, Latro?"

I nodded, and so did the black man. I said, "A smallish silvery fish, rather plump. They're said to be delicious."

"That's true." (People in the crowd were shouting, "*Bring him!*" and "*Where is he?*" so that Hypereides was forced to raise his voice to make himself heard.) "But pilchards are oily fish—fat fish even when salted. Now I know that both of you are sensible men. I want to put a question to you. It's of some importance, and I want you to consider it seriously."

Both of us nodded again.

Hypereides drew a deep breath. "If some dried and salted pilchards were cast onto the coals of a charcoal brazier—with a good fire going—don't you think that the sudden melting of all their fat might make them move? Or perhaps that oil dripping from the fish onto the coals might spatter violently and, so to speak, toss the fish about?"

I nodded and the black man shrugged.

"Ah," said Hypereides. "I'm of one mind with Latro, and Latro was there and saw them, even if he doesn't remember."

Just then a roar went up from the crowd.

The black man pointed with his chin as Hypereides shouted, "Look! Here they come—worth a round hundred talents apiece, and about to be slaughtered like a couple of goats." He shook his head and appeared genuinely saddened.

The man must have been close to fifty, strongly built and of medium height, with a beard the color of iron. One saw at once, from his dress, that he was a Mede. His son appeared to be fourteen or so; his face was as unformed as the faces of most boys of that age, but he had fine, dark eyes. The man's wrists were tied in front of him.

With them was a tall, lean man in armor who bore neither a shield nor a spear. I saw no sign of a sword from him, but the heralds cried, "*Silence! Silence, everybody, for Xanthippos, the noble strategist of Athens!*" "Thought," and when the chattering of the crowd had been muted a bit, he stepped forward.

"*People of Sestos,*" he said. "*Aeolians! Hellenes!*" He spoke loudly, but as if this commanding voice were natural to him. "*Hear me! I do not come before you to speak for Hellas!*"

That surprised the crowd so much that it actually fell silent, so that the birds could be heard crying above Helle's Sea.

Xanthippos continued, "*I wish that I did—that we were come at last to a time when brother no longer warred against brother.*"

That drew a resounding cheer. As it died away, Hypereides grinned at me. “They’re hoping that we’ve forgotten they were fighting us not so long ago.”

“Yet speak I do—and I am proud indeed to speak—as the representative of the Assembly of Thought. My city has returned to yours the greatest blessing that any people can possess—liberty.”

Another cheer for that.

“For which we ask only your gratitude.”

There were shouts of thanks.

“I said I could not speak for the Hellenes. Who knows what Tower Hill may do? Not I. Who knows the will of the wild folk of Bearland? Not I again, O citizens of Sestos. And not you. Those few Rope Makers who were here took ship before your city could be freed, as you know. And as for Hill, who does not know how savagely its spears seconded the barbarian?”

That brought a growl of anger from the crowd. Hypereides whispered, “Strike again, Xanthippos. They’re still breathing.”

“Many of my brave friends—and they were friends of yours, never forget that—lie in the great grave at Clay. They were sent there not by the arrows of the barbarians but by the horse of Asopodorus of Hill.”

At this the crowd gave a little moan, as though a thousand women had felt the first pangs of labor. I reflected that it might well be true, that in years to come men might say that something new had been born today on this narrow finger of the west thrusting eastward into Helle’s Sea.

“And yet my city has many more sons, men equally brave; and whenever you may have need of them, they shall come to you with all speed.”

Wild cheering.

“Now to the business at hand. We stand here, you and I, as servants of the gods. I need not recount to you the many crimes of this man Artajctes. You know them better than I. Many have counseled me that he should be returned to his own country upon the payment of a rich ransom.” It seemed to me that Xanthippos darted a glance at Hypereides here, although Hypereides appeared insensible of it. *“I have rejected that counsel.”*

The crowd shouted its approval.

“But before justice is done to Artajctes, we will act as only free men can—we will hold a public election. In my own city, where so many urns and serving dishes are made, we cast our votes on shards of broken pottery, each citizen scratching the initial of the candidate he favors in the glaze. In Sestos I am given to understand, your custom is to vote with stones—a white stone for yes, a black one for no, and so forth. This day, also, you shall cast your votes with stones. The boy you see beside him”— Xanthippos pointed to him—*“is the blasphemer’s son.”*

There was a mutter of anger at that, and a man on my left shook his fist.

“You of Sestos alone shall determine whether he lives or dies. If you will that he lives, move aside and let him flee. But if instead it is your will that he die, stop him, and cast a stone. The choice is yours!”

Xanthippos motioned to the soldiers standing with Artayctes and his son, and one whispered in the boy's ear and slapped his back. Xanthippos had assumed that the boy would try to dash to freedom through the crowd; but he ran away from it instead, down the narrowing finger of sand and shaft toward the sea, I suppose with the thought of swimming when he reached the water.

He never did. Stones flew, and a score of men at least got past the soldiers and ran after him. I saw him fall, struck on the ear by a stone as big as my fist. He got up and staggered a few steps more before being struck by half a hundred. Although I hope he died quickly, I cannot say precisely when it was that his life ended; certainly many stoned his body long after he was dead.

As for his father, after he had watched his son die, he was laid on his back upon the timber and spikes were driven through both his ankles and both wrists into the wood; when it was done, the timber was set upright in the hole that had been dug for it and rocks and sand piled around it to keep it so. Some of the women present flung stones at him also, but the soldiers forced them to stop, fearing that their stones would strike the five soldiers Xanthippos had stationed to guard him.

"Come," said Hypereides. "The real action's over, and I've a good many things to see to. Latro, I want you to buy us those cloaks we were talking about. Can you manage that if I give you the money?"

I told him I would, if there were cloaks for sale in the city.

"I'm sure there must be. Take him and Io with you so that they can pick out their own. Nothing too grand, mind you; they would only get you into trouble. Get something bright for me, though. Not red, because that's what the Rope Makers wear—not that anybody would take me for a Rope Maker, I imagine. Not yellow, either; the yellow ones fade so quickly. Make it blue or green, rich looking like they have something like that, and suited to my height." He is half a head shorter than the black man and I. "And make certain it's thick and warm."

I nodded, and he handed me four silver drachmas. The black man touched his shoulder and pretended to tug at a rope of air.

"Ah, the voyage! You're right, I promised I'd tell you about that. Well, it's simple enough. Do both of you know about the Great King's bridge?"

I said, "I remember that the heralds said this was where it ended. I imagine that the Great King's army must have marched up the same road we came down to get here."

"Right you are. It was a bridge of boats, scores of them, I would think, all tied together by long cables, with planks laid over their decks to make a road. It was here for nearly a year, according to what I've heard, before a big storm finally broke the cables."

We nodded to show we understood.

"The People from Parsa didn't fix it, but they stored the cables here in Sestos. They must have been very costly, and of course they could be spliced if the Great King ever ordered the bridge rebuilt. Xanthippos wants to take them back to Thought to show off. They should cause quite a stir, because nobody at home has ever seen cables anything like their size." Hypereides held out his arms to indicate the circumference of the cables, and even if he was doubling their diameter, they are very large indeed.

“Well, as you can imagine,” he continued, “the first thing that everybody’s sure to ask is what made them and what happened to him. Xanthippos had me look into that, and I found out that the boy was a fellow called Oeobazus, one of the barbarians who let themselves down from the city wall with Artajctes. And last night, when you and I talked to him, Latro, Artajctes said that they had intended to go north, maybe as far as Miltiades’ wall. Xanthippos would like to have this Oeobazus to trot out for the Assembly as well as the cables, so we’re to go after him as soon as *Europa*’s ready.”

I asked when that would be.

“Tomorrow afternoon, I hope.” Hypereides sighed. “Which most likely means the day after. The men are touching up her caulking now, and they ought to be finished today. Then we’ll have to load the stores. But there’s still some to get, and I’m not getting them by standing here talking to you two. So go and see about those cloaks, like I told you. When you’ve done that, pack up everything—we may not come back here, I don’t know.”

He hurried off toward the docks after that, and the black man and I returned to Sestos and the house in which we had slept to fetch Io.

We found it empty, however.

The Mantis

Hegesistratus interrupted me, but now I write again. It is very late now, and all the others are asleep, but Io has told me that soon after the sun rises I will forget all that I have seen and heard today, and there are things that I must set down.

When the black man and I returned to this house and found Io gone, I was anxious about her; for though I cannot recall how it is I came to have such a slave, I know I love her. The black man laughed at my gloomy face and said by signs that he thought Io had followed us to see Artajctes killed, and was forced to admit he was probably right.

Accordingly we left the house again and went to the market. Several of the shops fronting on the street offered cloaks for sale. I bought rough, undyed ones for the black man, Io, and myself, new cloaks made without washing the oil out of the wool and woven so tightly they would shed rain. I knew that such a colored cloak as Hypereides wanted would be costly, so we bargained for a long time over our purchase, the black man (who is a better bargainer than I, I think) speaking much to the shopkeeper in a language I do not understand. I soon realized, however, that the shopkeeper knew something of it, though he feigned otherwise. And at length even I was able to catch a word or two—*zlh*, which I believe is “cheap,” and *sel*, “jackal,” a word the shopkeeper did not like.

While they were haggling, I was searching for a cloak for Hypereides. Most of the brightly dyed ones seemed too thin for winter to me. At last I found a thick, warm one of the right length, bright blue, woven of fine, soft wool. This I carried to the shopkeeper, who must have been very tired from arguing with the black man by then. I showed him our four silver drachmas and the four cloaks, and explained that the four drachmas were all the money we had.

(That was not strictly true, as I know the black man has some money of his own; but he would not have spent it for the cloaks, I feel sure, and he probably did not have it upon his person.)

If he would let us have all four cloaks for the drachmas, I said, well and good—we had a bargain; if he would not, we would have no choice but to trade elsewhere. He examined the drachmas and weighed them while the black man and I watched him to make certain he did not substitute worn ones. At last he said that he could not let all four cloaks go at such a price and that the blue one alone should bring him two drachmas at least, but that he would give us the gray cloaks we wanted for ourselves for a drachma apiece if we would buy it.

I told him we could not spare the smallest cloak, which we required for a child—after which we went to a different shop and started the entire process again. It was only then that I realized, from things that the second shopkeeper let drop, just how nervous such merchants here have become because they do not know whether the soldiers from Thought will go or stay. If they stay, these shop-

may hope for very good business indeed, since most of the soldiers have some plunder and there are few who have a great deal. But if the soldiers go home and the People from Parsa return and lay siege to the city, the shops will have no business at all, because everyone saves his money to buy food during a siege. When I understood this, I contrived to mention to the black man that we would sail tomorrow, and the price of the green cloak I was examining dropped considerably.

Just then the keeper of the first shop we had visited came in (the owner of the second looking though he hoped someday to murder him) and said he had reconsidered: we could have all four cloaks for the four drachmas. We returned to his shop with him, and he held out his hand for the money. But I thought that he deserved to be punished for making us bargain so long; thus I began examining the cloaks yet again, and while I was looking at the blue one I took care to ask the black man whether he felt it would do for Hypereides on the coming voyage.

The shopkeeper cleared his throat. "You're sailing, then? And your captain's Hypereides?"

"That's right," I told him, "but the other ships won't put out when we do. They'll be staying here for a few days more at least."

Now the shopkeeper surprised me, and the black man, too, I think. He said, "This Hypereides—he bald? Rather a round face? Wait, he told me the name of his ship. *Europa*?"

"Yes," I said, "that's our captain."

"Oh. Ah. Well, perhaps I shouldn't tell you this, but if you're going to get that cloak for him, he'll have at least two new ones. He came in after you left and gave me three drachmas for a really choice scarlet one." The shopkeeper took the blue cloak from me and held it up. "That one was for a big man, though."

I looked at the black man and he at me, and it was plain that neither of us understood.

The shopkeeper got out a waxed tablet and a stylus. "I'm going to write out a bill of sale for you. You can put your mark on it. Tell your captain that if he wants to return the blue cloak, I'll show him the price and give back his money."

He scratched away at the tablet; and when he had finished, I wrote *Latro* alongside each line in the characters I am using now, keeping it close so it would be sure to blur if he held a heated basin near the tablet to erase it. Then the black man and I carried the cloaks here and packed everything. I hoped from moment to moment that Io would return, but she did not.

When it was done, I asked the black man what he intended to do, and he made signs to show me that he was going to his room to sleep awhile. I told him I would do the same, and we parted. After a few moments, I opened the door of my room as quietly as I could and crept out just in time to see the black man slipping out his own with equal stealth. I smiled and shook my head, he grinned at me, and together we walked back to the sand spit where the Great King's bridge had ended, in the hope of finding Io.

That at least was the black man's only motive, I believe; as for me, I confess I went with a double purpose, for I meant to set Artayctes free should the opportunity present itself.

As we drew near the place, we met the last idlers from the crowd returning home; several told

that Artaÿctes was dead. One seemed a sensible enough fellow, so I stopped him and asked how he knew. He told us that the soldiers had pricked him with their spears without result, and at last one had driven the head of his spear into his belly to determine whether his blood would spurt; it had not, but had leaked away like water from a sponge, so it was certain that the action of the heart had ceased.

The black man made signs then, urging me to inquire about Io. I did, and the man we were questioning said that only one child had stayed behind, a half-grown girl who was with a lame man. I did not think that Io could be considered half-grown (I remembered her well from having spoken to her this morning), and as we hurried along I asked the black man whether he knew of any such lame man. He shook his head.

Yet it was Io, and I recognized her at once. Only she, a boy, the soldiers, and the man the idler had mentioned remained with the corpse of Artaÿctes. The man with Io was leaning on a crutch, and I saw that he had lost his right foot; in its place was a wooden socket ending in a peg. This was tied to his calf with leather strips like the laces of a sandal. He was weeping while Io sought to comfort him. She waved and smiled, however, when she saw us.

I told her that she should not have disobeyed Hypereides, and though I would not beat her for it, Hypereides might. (I did not say this to her, but I feared that if he beat her too severely I might kill him. Then I myself might well be killed by the soldiers from Thought.) She explained that she had not meant to disobey, but had been sitting on the step when she had seen the lame man; he had seemed so weary and so sorrowful that she tried to comfort him, and he had asked her to go with him because both his crutch and the tip of his wooden foot sank in the sand. Thus, Io said, she had not gone to see Artaÿctes die—which was what Hypereides had forbidden—but to assist the lame man, a fellow Hellene, which Hypereides had certainly not ordered her not to do.

The black man grinned at all this, but I had to admit there was some justice in what she said. I told the lame man that she would have to return to the house with us now, but that we would help him if he, too, were ready to go back to Sestos.

He nodded and thanked me, and I let him lean upon my arm. I admit that I was curious about him, a Hellene who wept for a Mede; and so when we had gone some small distance, I asked what he knew of Artaÿctes, and whether he had been a good man.

“He was a good friend to me,” the lame man answered. “The last friend I had in this part of the world.”

I asked, “But weren’t you Hellenes fighting the People from Parsa? I seem to recall that.”

He shook his head, saying that only certain cities were at war with the Great King, some of them most unwisely. No one, he added, had fought more bravely at the Battle of Peace than Queen Artemisia, the ruler of a city of Hellenes allied with the Great King. At Clay, he said, the cavalry of Hill had been accounted the bravest of the brave, while Hill’s Sacred Band had fought to the last man.

“I’m from Hill,” Io told him proudly.

He smiled at her and wiped his eyes. “I knew that already, my dear; you have only to speak to tell everyone. I myself am from the Isle of Zakunthios. Do you know where that is?”

Io did not.

“It’s a small island in the west, and perhaps it is because it’s so small that it’s so lovely, and so much loved by all its sons.”

Io said politely, “I hope someday to see it, sir.”

“So do I,” the lame man told her. “That is, I hope to see it once more at a time when it will be safe for me to go home.” Turning to me, he added, “Thank you for your help—I believe the road’s firm enough for me now.”

I was so busy with my own thoughts that I hardly heard him. If he had really been a friend of Artaÿctes’ (and surely here no Hellene would lie about that) it seemed likely he knew Oeobazus, for whom we would soon be searching. Furthermore he might help me rescue him, if rescue were necessary. Crippled as he was, he could be of no great use in a fight; but I reflected that there was always more to a battle than fighting, and that if Artaÿctes had been his friend, Artaÿctes had perhaps found him of service.

With these thoughts in mind, I offered him the hospitality of the house Hypereides had commandeered, mentioning that we had plenty of food there and some good wine, and suggesting I might sleep there tonight if he wished, with Hypereides’ permission.

He thanked me and explained that he was not short of money, Artaÿctes having rewarded him generously on many occasions. He was staying with a well-to-do family, he said, where everything was comfortable enough. “My name is Hegesistratus,” he added. “Hegesistratus, son of Tellias, though Hegesistratus of Elis is what I’m generally called now.”

Io said, “Oh, we’ve been to Elis. It was on the way to—to a place up north where King Pausanias sacrificed. Latro doesn’t remember it, but the black man and I do. Why do they say you’re from Elis if you’re really from Zakunthios?”

“Because I’m from Elis, too,” Hegesistratus told her, “and most recently. Our family has its roots there—but this is no story for a little maid. Not even a maid from Hill.”

“I’m Latro,” I told him. “You already know who Io is, I imagine. Neither of us knows our friend’s name—we don’t speak his language—but we vouch for his character.”

Hegesistratus met the black man’s eyes for a moment that seemed very long to me, then spoke to him in another tongue (I think in that which the black man had used to the shopkeeper); and the black man answered him in the same way. Soon he touched Hegesistratus’ forehead, and Hegesistratus touched his.

“That is the speech of Aram,” Hegesistratus told me. “In it, your friend is called Seven Lions.”

We were nearing the city gate then, and he asked me whether the house I had mentioned was much farther. As it happened, it was on the next street after the wall, and I told him so.

“My lodgings are on the other side of the marketplace,” he said. “Might I stop, then, and take the cup of wine with you? Walking makes my stump sore”—he gestured toward his crippled leg—“and I would be very grateful for the chance to rest it a bit.”

I urged him to stay as long as he wished, and told him that I would like his opinion of my sword.

Favorable Auspices

Hegesistratus has been on the wall observing birds. He says our voyage will be fortunate, and he will come with us. Hypereides wanted to know whether we would find the man we seek, whether we would bring him to Xanthippos, and how the Assembly would reward us for it; but Hegesistratus would answer none of these questions, saying that telling more than one knows is a pit dug for such as he. He and I spoke together awhile, but he has left now.

An odd thing happened while the black man, Io, and I sat at wine with him; I do not understand it, so I shall record it here exactly as it took place, without comment, or at least with very little.

As we chatted, I became more and more curious concerning my sword. I had seen it lying in the chest this morning when I put on a clean chiton and again when the black man and I packed; but I had felt no curiosity about it at all. Now I could scarcely remain at my place. At one moment I feared it had been stolen. At the next, I felt certain it possessed some peculiarity upon which Hegesistratus's comments would be deeply enlightening.

As soon as he had mixed the wine and water, I rose, hurried to my room, and got out my sword. I was about to give it to him when he struck my wrist with his crutch and it fell from my hand; the black man jumped up brandishing his stool, and Io screamed.

Hegesistratus alone remained calm, never rising. He told me to pick up my sword and return it to the scabbard. (Its point had sunk so deeply into the floor that I had to use both hands to wrench it free.) I felt then as though I had wakened from a dream. The black man shouted at me, indicating the wine, then spoke loudly to Hegesistratus, pointing at me and toward the ceiling. Hegesistratus said, "He wishes me to remind you that a guest is sacred. The gods, he says, will punish one who, having invited a stranger, harms him without cause."

I nodded.

Io whispered, "Latro forgets. Sometimes—"

Hegesistratus silenced her with a gesture. "Latro, what were you going to do with that sword?"

I told him that I had wanted him to examine it.

"And do you still?"

I shook my head.

"Very well," he said, "in that case I will. Draw it again and put it on the table, please."

I did as he asked, and he laid both hands upon the flat of the blade and shut his eyes. So he sat for a long time—so long that I had rubbed my wrist and drained my wine before he opened them once more.

"What is it?" Io asked when he had withdrawn his hands.

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